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TAGS: [GM](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [NATO](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [EUN](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#)
SUBJECT: STEINMEIER'S VISIT "TIMELY" AND "A SUCCESS."

REF: A. 08 BERLIN 1601
[1](#)B. 09 BERLIN 217
[1](#)C. 08 BERLIN 950
[1](#)D. 08 BERLIN 1044
[1](#)E. 09 BERLIN 229

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES JOHN KOENIG. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: German Foreign Minister Steinmeier's February 17-18 visit to Iraq -- the first by a German FM in 22 years -- focused strictly on bilateral relations and particularly on economic and cultural ties. He was joined by three Bundestag (Parliament) members, seven business leaders, the heads of two cultural organizations, roughly a dozen journalists, and advisors from the German MFA. During his visit, Steinmeier had a number of high-level meetings, opened a German business center in the Green Zone, officially inaugurated the German Consulate General in Erbil, and signed two cultural MOUs. Additional details on the economic/commercial aspects of the visit will be reported separately. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) PolOff met with Klemens Semtner, head of the Iraq Unit at the MFA, February 24, to learn more about German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier's February 17-18 trip to Baghdad and Erbil, Iraq. In his visit to Iraq -- the first visit of a German FM to the country in 22 years -- Steinmeier had a number of bilateral meetings with Iraqi counterparts, including President Talabani, Prime Minister Maliki, FM Zebari, and Human Rights Minister Salim, as well as several bishops from different Christian denominations. The talks focused mainly on steps to support Iraq's stabilization, with Iraqi officials highlighting progress made and the successful conduct of Provincial elections. Maliki reportedly seemed "confident" and invited all European partners to support Iraq in its reconstruction effort. Accompanying Bundestag members Walter Kolbow (SPD), Otto Schily (SPD), and Peter Gauweiler (CSU) -- the latter two of whom are alumni of earlier Iraq visits -- also welcomed the opportunity to "improve the German-Iraqi relationship." When asked about upcoming visits, Semtner reported that German Chancellor Angela Merkel received an official invitation from PM Maliki. However, according to Chancellery Director for Security Affairs Geza von Geyr, there is "at present no discussion regarding a possible (Merkel) visit" to Iraq.

[1](#)3. (C) While the focus of the meetings was "strictly bilateral," Semtner -- who accompanied the FM -- did report some surprise about the superficial nature of the discussions when other issues were raised. For example, when Steinmeier asked PM Maliki for his thoughts on the Iran issue, Maliki reportedly offered no views on whether the U.S. should open up direct contacts with Iran quickly or wait until after Iranian elections in June. Both Maliki and Zebari did note

that Iraq is prepared to play a constructive role with Iran and also in broader Middle East questions. Interestingly, no officials repeated Maliki's recent call for Egypt to cut ties with Israel (due to the Gaza conflict), indicating to German interlocutors that his earlier comment may have been "uncoordinated."

¶4. (C) During his visit, Steinmeier did not request meetings with any U.S., Coalition, or NTM-I officials. While earlier comments pledging that Germany would "re-examine Iraq" with an eye toward renewed transatlantic cooperation (Ref A), Germany's "deliverables" in Baghdad were fairly modest: the signing of two cultural MOUs to a) enhance university cooperation, and b) jump-start a student exchange program; and the continuation of negotiations on an investment agreement. Thomas Lenferding, the Deputy of the MFA's Iraq Unit, noted that the EUJUST LEX mission -- which Germany actively supports -- would be expanded in the near future and the training of public officials and judges would begin to take place in Iraq. As reported in Ref B, MFA State Secretary Reinhard Silberberg recently told Deputy Secretary Steinberg that Germany would send some judges to Iraq to participate in this program.

¶5. (SBU) Following on last summer's Maliki visit to Berlin and former German Economic Minister Glos's trip to Baghdad, economic issues continued to be the main push (Ref C and D) of the Steinmeier visit. According to Semtner, the Iraqi government's priorities include strengthening and deepening the economy, infrastructure reconstruction, and education. Seven German business leaders, including representatives from

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Siemens, MAN (vehicles), Daimler, and GMS (medical services) were part of the delegation and they had a number of separate meetings with Iraqi ministries to discuss railway building, hospital reconstruction, and opportunities for investment in the energy sector. Steinmeier and Maliki -- in a symbolic gesture -- jointly opened a bureau for "Business Services Baghdad" which will provide information and advice for German enterprises interested in investing in Iraq. (Additional information about the economic and commercial aspects of the visit will be reported septel.)

¶6. (SBU) On his second day, Steinmeier, accompanied by Zebari (in a "highly appreciated gesture"), flew to Erbil. While there, he officially opened the new German Consulate General (thereby expanding and formalizing a diplomatic presence they have had there since April 2008), visited a public school (where German is taught), and inaugurated a training center for Iraqi officials, judges and returnees. The latter -- the European Technology and Training Center (ETTC) -- is run by a German non-profit company and incorporates projects from other European partners (UK, Sweden, Denmark). Steinmeier met with the President and the Prime Minister of the Kurdish Regional Government, Massoud Barzani and Nechirvan Barzani, and with the President of Parliament, Adnan Mufti, and several other cabinet members. Talks focused on resolving outstanding issues between the regional government and Baghdad. Semtner reported that the Kurdish side said it was optimistic about finding compromise (although there was no mention of the referendum in Kirkuk) and reiterated its readiness to continue protecting the territorial integrity of Iraq.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: Steinmeier's "timely" visit was largely viewed as a success within German political circles, and press reports of his visit were positive. Steinmeier, the SPD candidate for Chancellor in the September 2009 national elections, is always cautious in examining German engagement in Iraq. While opposition to "boots-on-the-ground" (Ref E) remains gospel, increased economic and cultural engagement in Iraq is not expected to be politicized in the upcoming elections -- a notable change from the past. Steinmeier may also look for dividends in developing relations with the new U.S. Administration. Post welcomes opportunities to work

more closely with the German government and private sector to increase German engagement in Iraq. END COMMENT.

Koenig